



# NEWSLETTER

**SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS**

**SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF THE MILITARY**



## ZIMMERMAN RECOGNIZES WW II VETERANS

As he travels across the state, SDDVA Secretary Zimmerman loves the opportunity to thank veterans for their service. This week he had the distinct honor to recognize two World War II Veterans and present them with the SDDVA World War II medal.

"America's Veterans have done everything asked of them in their mission to serve our country and



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it is never too late to give them a hero's welcome home," said Secretary Zimmerman. "There is no greater reward then to express gratitude for their heroism and willingness to sacrifice for a cause greater than themselves. By giving thanks, you have the opportunity to listen to their stories."

# RECOGNITION OF WWII VETERANS CONTINUES

Day, Turner, Hughes, Stanley and Sully County VSOs hosted numerous events to honor their World War II Veterans.

Events like these are a great opportunity to say thank you to those who have served in the United States Armed Forces. An opportunity to thank those who protected



their fellow citizens at home and abroad from harm. Those who fought for our freedom, made sacrifices be-

yond comprehension, and did it because of a love of their country, not to be thanked.

A "SHOUT OUT" to these VSO's and their assistants for honoring these heroes.





# 153RD ENGINEER BATTALION CHANGES COMMAND

Lt. Col. Dennis Bickett, of Vermillion, took command of the South Dakota Army National Guard's 153rd Engineer Battalion from Lt. Col. Trent Bruce, of Sioux Falls, during a change of command ceremony at the Huron National Guard Armory, Jan. 7.

Bickett, who has been a member of the National Guard for 30 years, will now oversee the Huron unit that Bruce has commanded since October 2015.

"I am extremely excited for this challenge," said Bickett. "I have been looking forward to this opportunity for a long time. The 153rd has an exemplary reputation that I plan to work to maintain."

As the commander of the 153rd, Bickett is responsible for the command and control of about 870 soldiers in 14 separate units and communities throughout South Dakota. The 153rd assists assigned units in meeting training, administrative and logistical requirements to maintain the unit's readiness in support of their state and federal missions.

Bickett is employed at Mercy Medical Center in Sioux City, Iowa, and is currently the therapy manager overseeing physical, occupational and speech therapy. Bruce will be assigned to the Joint Force Headquarters in Rapid City as the mobilization readiness officer.



# DISCHARGE UPGRADE PROCESS

The Department of Defense (DOD), through a joint initiative with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), has launched a new web-based tool that will provide customized guidance to veterans who desire to upgrade or change the conditions of their military discharge.

By answering a few short questions, veterans will receive information on the specific armed services board to contact, the form(s) to fill out, special guidance applicable to their case, where to send their application and helpful tips for appealing their discharge.

"This new tool and partnership with DOD is one of many VA initiatives offered to veterans who believe they may have been unfairly discharged or received an unfair discharge characterization," said VA Secretary Dr. David J. Shulkin. "Veterans who believe their discharge was unjust, erroneous or warrants an upgrade are encouraged to use the tool and then apply for review."

DOD officials also praised the new innovative tool.

"We are thrilled to have partnered with the United States Department of Veterans Affairs in developing this wonderful and easily accessible tool," said Mr. Robert Wilkie, Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness. "We support our veterans, whether they served recently or long ago, and we are excited to introduce a tool that will individualize the guidance for those who desire an upgrade or change in their military discharge."

The military has estimated that tens of thousands of Veterans with less than honorable discharges are especially likely to have unjust discharges deserving of upgrades. These are veterans who were discharged due to incidents relating to post-traumatic stress disorder, traumatic brain injury or sexual orientation. Fragmented and confusing information has historically deterred veterans from obtaining crucial information and — in many cases — necessary benefits.

The discharge upgrade tool is available at <https://www.vets.gov/discharge-upgrade-instructions>.



# SEAMLESS CARE FOR TRAVELING VETERANS



## Seamless Care for Traveling Veterans Frequently Asked Questions



### **How does VA coordinate care if I am traveling or living at a temporary address?**

Generally, your VA Patient Aligned Care Team (PACT) – located within your primary care clinic -- is responsible for your health care even when you travel or are temporarily experiencing a change of address, such as living in one state during the winter and another during summer. If you see a VA provider while traveling, care received at that facility will be documented in your electronic medical record. The information will be available to your local VA PACT to review and follow up with treatment options for you, if necessary.

### **When should I contact my PACT regarding travel?**

To ensure your health care is timely and coordinated, contact your PACT or Specialty Care Provider(s) 4 to 6

weeks prior to beginning extended travel, or as soon as possible. When you contact your PACT, have the following information available:

- the travel destination(s) and temporary address
- a valid telephone number
- arrival and departure dates
- specific care concerns

### **How can I reach my PACT or provider without an appointment?**

If you are unable to make an appointment to see your PACT or provider in person, you can reach them by telephone or through secure messaging in MyHealtheVet. For more information about MyHealtheVet and how to register, visit [www. MyHealtheVet.va.gov](http://www.MyHealtheVet.va.gov).

### **Why is it important to discuss my travel plans with the VA?**

VA's goal is to ensure your quality of health care is consistent across medical facilities. When you inform your PACT of your extended travel plans, VA can prepare the alternate site for your arrival, if outpatient care is needed. Coordination helps to prevent any disruption in your care.

### **Who can I contact for more information?**

For more information, contact your PACT or Traveling Veteran Coordinator at your local VA facility or call toll free 1-877-222-VETS (8387) Monday through Friday between 8 a.m. and 8 p.m. Eastern.

Sioux Falls VA Health Care System

Traveling Veteran Coordinator: Jennifer Lacey, RN

Phone: 605-336-3230 ext. 97646, Fax: 612-725-4983, Pager: 236



# UPCOMING EVENTS

2018

Feb 11—VABHHCS Four Chaplain Service—St. Francis Catholic Church—1:30 pm (MT)  
Feb 16-18—American Legion Mid Winter Conference—Oacoma  
Feb 23-25—Vietnam Veterans & Era Reunion—Ramada Inn—Mitchell  
Mar 4-8—National VFW Conference—Washington, DC  
Mar 6—SFVAHCS Town Hall—Sioux Falls VA Auditorium—5:00 pm (CT)  
Mar 9—VABHHCS VSO Congressional Forum—VFW Post 1273—Rapid City—10:00 am (MT)  
Mar 13—VABHHCS Veteran Town Hall and Outreach—Newcastle Senior Center—8:00 am (MT)  
Mar 13—VABHHCS Veteran Town Hall and Outreach—Sundance Senior Center—1:00 pm (MT)  
Mar 22—Veterans Legal Services—Watertown National Guard Armory—9:00 am—3:00 pm (CT)  
Mar 23—Veterans Legal Services—Sioux Falls DAV—9:00 am—3:00 pm (CT)  
Apr 17—Veterans Council Meeting—PVA Headquarters—Sioux Falls—10:00 am (CT)  
Apr 27-29—DAV State Convention—The Lodge—Deadwood  
Jun 7-10—American Legion State Convention—Spearfish  
Jun 14-17—VFW State Convention—Sioux Falls  
Jul 14-17—DAV National Convention—Reno, NV  
Jul 21-25—VFW National Convention—Kansas City, MO  
Jul 26—VABHHCS Veterans Town Hall—Post 8 American Legion—Pierre  
Aug 20-24—SDDVA Benefits School—Ramkota—Pierre  
Aug 20-24—American Legion National Convention—Minneapolis, MN  
Oct 10—SD Veterans Commission Meeting—Soldiers and Sailors Building—Pierre—8:00 am (CT)



Audry Ricketts, Public Information Officer  
South Dakota Department of the Military <http://military.sd.gov>  
South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs <http://vetaffairs.sd.gov>  
Soldiers and Sailors Building - 425 E Capitol Avenue  
Pierre, SD 57501  
Phone: 605-773-8242  
E-mail address: [audry.ricketts@state.sd.us](mailto:audry.ricketts@state.sd.us)

